

Montana State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes
March 3, 2016

Montana State Rehabilitation Council
March 3, 2016
Disability Rights Montana Conference Room

Members present: Rick Heitz, Anna Gibbs, John Senn, Linda Zermeno, Tom Osborn, Jim Marks, Michelle Pickell (phone), Coreen Faulkner, Donna Marie Robnett, Tiffany Costa, Mike Woods

Members absent: Robin Haux, Frank Podobnik, Amy Capalupo (excused)

Staff and visitors present: Peggy Williams, Chanda Hermanson-Dudley, Bronwyn Troutman, Mark Mahnke (phone), Mike Hermanson, Tammy Hogan, Barb Schiedermayer, Dalayna Hillis, Kathy Hampton

Rick Heitz opened the meeting and the minutes from November were approved. There was no public comment.

State and Federal Update

Jim Marks updated the Council on the state and national happenings. Regarding the upcoming Legislature (2017) which we are starting to prepare for, we are hearing it will be a “stay-even” session. Oil prices have crashed, coal is losing to natural gas, and farm commodities are down. However, if there are any needs for new money, we want to ask for them. Already we are thinking of more money for staff—the 2015 Legislature cut some positions, so we’ve been double filling other positions to make up for it—and additional funding for long term supported employment.

At the federal level, there is a lot of doom and gloom talk: How should VR be in the future? Traditionally VR has had individual services, and now VR is shifting to “one-stop” including more partnerships, services to groups, systems change services, and services to groups.

Order of Selection requires that people with the most significant disabilities be served first. Last fall, VRBS closed category 3, people without significant disabilities. This means that new people applying to VRBS will not be served if they fall into category 3. Jim stated that VRBS is looking at closing category 2, people with significant disabilities, on July 1. This means that the only new people to be served will be those with the most significant disabilities (category 1). However, anyone who is currently on the caseload will continue to be served. The reason for the budget shortfall is that the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that 15% of the grant be spent on high school students with disabilities. This means that only 85% of the grant can be spent on the people we have traditionally served.

Section 511 of WIOA will bring more people with the most significant disabilities to our door, and these people will likely require higher cost services. Section 511 is civil rights legislation that makes sure people previously pipelined into subminimum segregated employment can have a choice. It says that people under age 24 cannot be placed in a subminimum segregated job unless they received pre-employment transitions services and work experience. VRBS is not the enforcement agency, but must review all people in subminimum jobs once per year and ask them if they want to move out. VRBS plans to contract with the independent living centers to perform the review.

VRBS recently reorganized and eliminated the regional structure. The current regional administrators were converted to program specialists in three priority areas: youth services, employer services, and quality services. These team leaders reported to the SRC later in the day.

Jim also reported that the case management system (MACS) still is not working well.

Field Services Update

Chanda Hermanson-Dudley stated that VRBS has received three requests for fair hearings, all of which were resolved at the administrative review level. Two of the hearings involved the work goal and the third involved communication and counselor change.

Chanda also mentioned that VRBS has filled many positions recently and has updated the learning disabilities procedure. In the area of order of selection, Chanda said VRBS is trying out the exception to the order that allows state to serve people from closed categories to maintain employment if they only need one service. So far, VRBS has done that for three cataract surgeries and one person who needed hearing aids.

Blind and Low Vision Update

Dalayna Hillis, Blind and Low Vision supervisor in Missoula, updated the Council on BLVS activities. BLVS has a Pre-Employment Transitions Services contract with Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. Dalayna also talked about the Older Blind Program. To be eligible for this program, clients must be 55 or older and have a severe visual impairment. The Visual Medical Program, which pays visual related medical bills, has been dropped. In its place is a program to serve children with visual instructional needs. In addition, BLVS serves people in the work program, similar to the VR program.

Movin On

Bronwyn Troutman talked about this four day campus experience. Last year 20 students participated at the University of Montana. Next year (2017) the program will move to MSU-Billings. The program will be June 27-30 and they are doing a lot of recruiting in Missoula. They also hope to get people from other areas of the state.

Election of Officers

Rick Heitz was elected Chair, and Mike Woods was elected vice-chair.

Meeting Dates

- June 9-10
- September 8-9
- November 3-4

In addition, SRC members will be invited to the VRBS All Staff meeting which will concentrate on implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This training will likely be held in late September or early October.

VRBS Teams

SRC members were invited to join one of the VRBS teams: Quality Services, Youth Services, Employer Services, and Assistive Technology. Contact Peggy to become involved.

Transitions/Training Update

Mark Mahnke talked about upcoming training events. On the March 17 webinar, Christy Robbins from Department of Labor will talk about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit benefit for employers. In the May webinar, Kathy West-Evans, the CSAVR expert on employers, will be the guest speaker. Mark mentioned that on the staff needs assessment, assistive technology training was a high need, and he is working with the Rural Institute to provide training on this. In addition, there will be statewide staff training on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in late September or early October. The SRC members will be invited to each of these trainings.

Mark also talked about transitions. The school contracts are moving along, we have a technical assistance contract with the Rural Institute, and we are working on an information packet for schools.

Mark mentioned that the old webinars are archived; if you are interested in seeing one, please contact Mark at mmahnke@mt.gov and he will send it to you.

Team Updates

Youth Services—Tammy Hogan, Youth Services Team Leader, reported that she is working with Mark Mahnke and Clay Calton on the Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS) contracts with schools. For FY2015, VRBS spent \$473,000 on Pre-ETS services, of which \$248,000 was through contracts with schools. So far in FY2016, VRBS has spent \$272,000 in Pre-ETS services, of which \$175,000 is through contracts with schools. The focus thus far has been on public schools, and some private schools have been interested also. The team is also looking at contracting with tribes. The team will participate in a meeting to provide services to Native American youth NOT on or near reservations. Recently OPI has asked to be included in some of the planning activities. Michelle Pickell volunteered to serve on the Youth Services team.

Quality Services—Barb Schiedermayer is working on recruiting, hiring and training quality employees. She has developed foundations training for new staff. She reviewed the importance of understanding eligibility; evolving/incremental goals; work experience; advanced degrees if needed; supported employment when needed. She also talked about VRBS guiding principles: disability is a natural part of life; high expectations; work and contribution; informed choice; right to fail; self advocacy; competitive integrated employment; innovation and opportunity; and partnership. Team members have not yet been chosen. Donna Marie Robnett asked to join the team when it is time.

Assistive Technology Team—Dalayna Hillis reported for Bev Berg, the team leader. Currently this team has four members. They are looking at assistive technology at the beginning of the rehabilitation process. They are doing an assessment of what we need, searching nationally for best practices, and recommending changes.

Employer Services—Chanda Hermanson-Dudley reported for Sally Sjaastad. This committee is working on developing a service delivery model that includes the employer as a customer. They are looking at Windmills training that VRBS staff could be trained as trainers and then implement the training to employers across Montana. The training has many modules. Sally is also checking with Department of Labor to see if they would like to be part of this. The committee is also looking at the Talent Acquisition Portal, a website for people with disabilities to be matched to jobs. They are developing a newsletter and requesting a VISTA volunteer to help with marketing. They are talking about having a pilot internship for a client to work in one of our offices. Michelle Pickell requested to be on this team.

Strategic Plan and Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Mike Hermanson talked about the Strategic Plan Summary for fiscal years 2014 and 2015. The strategic plan covers three years, and we are currently in the third year. He also mentioned the first quarter (October through December 2015) evaluation. Then he reviewed the comprehensive needs assessment which feeds into the strategic plan for next year. Mike also reviewed the public comments that were received on the VRBS portion of the state plan. The comments were from Disability Rights Montana, Respectability, and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

For the new strategic plan, there is one goal: “Modernize the VRBS service delivery system to be consistent with WIOA requirements.” Under the goal are three priorities:

1. VRBS will be a leader in services to youth with disabilities across the state of Montana, primarily through providing a strong base of Pre-Employment Transitions Services from Montana students with disabilities.
2. Increase alignment with WIOA partners, with an emphasis on developing and enhancing services for employers.
3. Build and maintain the capacity necessary to provide persons with disabilities employed in sub-minimum/segregated wage jobs opportunities to choose and achieve competitive, integrated employment. (Section 511 of WIOA)

The meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be June 9 and 10 in Helena.